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# **Fasting reception of the blessed sacrament a custom of ...**

**Frederick Hall**



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**FASTING RECEPTION**  
**OF**  
**THE BLESSED SACRAMENT**

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FASTING RECEPTION  
OF THE  
BLESSED SACRAMENT

*A Custom of the Church Catholic*

BY

*FREDERICK HALL, M.A.*

AN ASSISTANT-CURATE OF S. AUGUSTINE  
KILBURN



RIVINGTONS  
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**Inscribed**

TO

**THE HON. CHARLES L. WOOD,**

**PRESIDENT OF**

***The English Church Union :***

**A SOCIETY**

**"FORMED FOR THE PURPOSE OF  
UNITING CLERGY AND LAITY IN LOYAL DEFENCE OF  
THE DOCTRINE AND DISCIPLINE OF  
THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND,  
AND OF THE RIGHTS AND LIBERTIES OF HER  
FAITHFUL CHILDREN :"**

***AN EXPRESSION***

**OF MUCH GRATITUDE AND GREAT RESPECT  
FROM ONE OF**

***Fifteen Thousand Members, Communicants.***



## Fasting Reception

OF THE

## BLESSED SACRAMENT

**I** BASE the practice of early and Fasting Communion on Catholic custom: and custom is unwritten human law.

How considerable is the importance which we attach to *custom* in matters of every-day life! What, for instance, would be thought of a man who persisted in attending the funeral of one very dear to him—his mother, his wife, or his child, bedecked in the brightest-coloured clothes on which he could lay hands? And what said if, in reply to all remonstrances, he urged, “No one’s grief under such circumstances could possibly be greater than my own; nothing can surpass the love that I bore the departed in her lifetime, and the respect that I entertain for her memory now; but I cannot submit to a custom which seems to me so exceedingly foolish as wearing black clothes in time of sorrow, as though, forsooth, the intensity of my grief were to be gauged by the depth of my mourning?” His friends would naturally ask him to consider the

feelings of others as well as his own, the pain that he would cause by his apparent slight to the deceased, and the occasion which he would give for others to question the reality of his grief, if he acted in a way so contrary to the custom of the country in which he lived. The fact is, no one can disregard the appeal to custom; no one who is not very wilful and insensible to the feelings of others does.

S. Basil, writing in the fourth century on marriage with a deceased wife's sister, says, "Our custom in this matter has the force of law, because the statutes we observe have been handed down to us by holy men."<sup>1</sup>

Tertullian says, in reference to certain practices of the Church, "For these and such like rules, if thou requirest a law in the Scriptures thou shalt find none. Tradition will be pleaded to thee as originating them, custom as confirming them, and faith as observing them."<sup>2</sup>

One custom of the Catholic Church—*mos pro lege*—though sadly forgotten in recent days, has been the fasting reception of the Blessed Sacrament, a practice which has been adopted as a special sign of reverence, a mark of our sense of the "great dignity of that Holy Mystery."

It was after the Paschal Supper indeed, and in the evening, that the Holy Eucharist was instituted by our Lord, but without any command with which we have

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Bishop of Lincoln on Lev. xviii. 18.

<sup>2</sup> *De Cor.* iv.

been charged, that the details on Maunday Thursday were to be considered an exact pattern for all future Celebrations; otherwise, It could *only* be celebrated in the evening, in a room, in ordinary dress, with common vessels, after supper, by men reclining on couches round a table. S. Gregory Nazianzen, in a sermon preached at Constantinople (January, A.D. 381), said: "Every action of Christ is not necessary to be imitated by us, for He celebrated the mystery of the Passion with His disciples in an upper room, and after supper; but we do it in the church, and before supper."<sup>1</sup> This distinction Canon Bright recognizes when he says, "In contemplating our Lord's life, the early Church saw plainly that while in some respects His actions were to be imitated closely, literally, and for ever, in others they were peculiar to, and a part of, His redemptive and incommunicable relation to the human race."<sup>2</sup>

Probably with the desire closely to conform to the pattern of the first celebration of the Holy Eucharist by our Lord Himself, the Christians of the very earliest age met together in the evening, and partook of a supper called the Agape, or Feast of Charity (S. Jude 12), preceded or followed<sup>3</sup> by the Holy Communion. But this practice led, as S. Paul tells us, to most unhappy results; the rich feasted to repletion, while the poor

<sup>1</sup> *Orat. 40 de Bapt.*, quoted in Bingham's *Antiquities*, xv. vii. 8.

<sup>2</sup> *Evening Communions*, p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> According to Mr. Conybear and Dean Howson (*Life of S. Paul* c. xiii.), the Agape originally preceded the Holy Eucharist, subsequently followed It, and finally was totally separated from It.

were famished; an unseemly contention prevailed; each desired to take before other his own supper; one was hungry, and another was drunken. (1 Cor. xi. 21.)

The immediate consequence of this desecration of the Holy Eucharist by those who failed to discern the Lord's Body (1 Cor. xi. 29) was that the members of the Church at Corinth were severely punished by God with sickness and even with death; "for this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep." (1 Cor. xi. 30.)

And S. Paul, while condemning generally the irreverence and justifying the divine judgment, intimates his intention of dealing more particularly with the evil at some future time; "the rest will I set in order when I come." S. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo (395-430 A.D.), in his letter to Januarius, quoted below, says that the practice of Fasting Communion was the outcome of the regulation then made by S. Paul. In confirmation of this, Mr. Scudamore points out that a year or two later S. Paul, at Troas, "broke bread" *previous* to the subsequent meal, the Agape;<sup>1</sup> and Pliny's letter serves as a further corroboration.

Bishop Wilberforce, when condemning Evening Communion in his *Charge* (A.D. 1860), writes: "No careful student of the New Testament will doubt that in the abuses which had crept into the Corinthian Church touching the Holy Eucharist, and in S. Paul's

<sup>1</sup> *Notitia Eucharistica*, p. 31.

treatment of them, they found the occasion and the time of the alteration."<sup>1</sup>

The letters of Pliny the younger, proconsul of Bithynia, in Asia Minor, are well known. In one of them (letter xcvi.)<sup>2</sup> he reports to the Emperor Trajan the result of his enquiry into the practices of the Christians who had received their teaching but forty years previously from S. Peter himself. "They affirmed," he writes (A.D. 104), "the whole of their guilt or their error was that they met on a certain stated day *before it was light*, and addressed themselves in a form of prayer to Christ as to some God, binding themselves by a solemn oath" (or sacrament—"sacramento"<sup>3</sup>), "not for the purposes of any wicked design, but never to commit any fraud, theft, or adultery, never to falsify their word, nor deny a trust when they should be called upon to deliver it up, *after which* it was their custom to separate, and then reassemble, to eat in common a harmless meal."

<sup>1</sup> Bishop Wilberforce's *Charge* (1860), p. 16.

<sup>2</sup> Melmoth's *Letters of Pliny*, ii. 671.

<sup>3</sup> "Can there be any reasonable doubt what the sacramentum against sin was, wherewith these early confessors said that they bound themselves 'very early' on the resurrection morning, &c. ? . . . Was it ever known in the Church of Christ that men should be allowed to take an oath that they would not commit sin ? . . . They knew full well that not in any vow but in closest communing with their risen Lord was their strength against iniquity ; and, speaking to a heathen, to whom the secrets of their faith could not be revealed, they would most naturally apply the word *sacramentum* to the Mystery of the Holy Eucharist. Doubtless it was for the Celebration that they thus assembled themselves before light."—BISHOP WILBERFORCE'S *Charge*, p. 14.



Tertullian (A.D. 200) speaks of "the reception of Holy Communion before all food"<sup>1</sup> as the accustomed habit of a Christian woman; and again he writes, 'The Sacrament of the Eucharist commanded by the Lord at the time of supper and to all, we receive even at our meetings before daybreak.'"

S. Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage and martyr for the faith (A.D. 258), thus defends the custom of the Church in his time: "It may be said that it was not in the morning, but after supper, that the Lord offered the mingled cup. Ought we then to celebrate the Lord's cup after supper? . . . It behoved Christ to offer about the evening of the day that the very hour of sacrifice might show the setting and the evening of the world, as it is written in Exodus, 'And all the people of the synagogue of the children of Israel shall kill it in the evening;' and again in the Psalms, 'Let the lifting up of my hands be an evening sacrifice.'<sup>3</sup> But we celebrate the resurrection of the Lord in the morning."<sup>4</sup>

S. Basil, Bishop of Cæsarea, in Cappadocia, who died A.D. 380, says, in regard to priests, "It is not possible to venture on the sacred work (of Celebration) without fasting."<sup>5</sup>

S. Ambrose, Bishop of Milan (A.D. 374), in his *Book of Elias and of Fasting*, chap. x., says, "that they

<sup>1</sup> *Ad Uxorem*, ii. 5.    <sup>2</sup> *De Cor. Mil.*, Lib. Fathers, x. 164.

<sup>3</sup> Ps. xli. 2.

<sup>4</sup> *To Cæcilius*, ep. lxii. 16. Clark's edition.

<sup>5</sup> *Hom. i. de Jejun.*, quoted in *Notitia Eucharistica*, p. 33.

prepared themselves by fasting to approach to the Holy Table."<sup>1</sup>

The testimony of S. Gregory of Nazianzen, the friend of S. Basil, and Bishop of Constantinople (A.D. 381), who comes next in chronological order, has been already given.

So strong was the feeling about Fasting Communion in the fourth century that a bishop of Alexandria was asked, "If a man in washing or bathing swallow a drop of water, may he communicate after it?"<sup>2</sup>

S. Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople (who died A.D. 407), says: "Thou, before thou hast partaken, fastest, that in a certain way thou mayest appear worthy of the Communion;"<sup>3</sup> and on another occasion he repudiates, with even more than his characteristic vehemence, the thought of having communicated any one who did not receive fasting.<sup>4</sup>

S. Augustine (A.D. 430), the greatest authority in the Church, to whom such frequent reference is made in the Book of Common Prayer ("What would S. Augustine have said?"<sup>5</sup> being considered as the end of controversy), writes: "It is clear that when the dis-

<sup>1</sup> *History of Ecclesiastical Writers*, i. 276. By Dupin, Doctor of the Sorbon and Regius Professor of Divinity in Paris. 1722.

<sup>2</sup> The answer was, "If Satan find an occasion of hindering us from the Communion, he will the oftener do it." Canonical Answers of Timothy, Bishop of Alexandria, A.D. 381. No. 16. Johnson's *Vade Mecum*, ii. 254.

<sup>3</sup> *Hom.* xxvii., Lib. Fathers, v. 380.

<sup>4</sup> Ep. 125, referred to by Bingham. It may be, as Mr. Poyntz suggests, that S. Chrysostom regarded the charge as an accusation of untruthfulness.

<sup>5</sup> Preface to Book of Common Prayer.

ciples first received the Body and Blood of the Lord they had not been fasting. Must we therefore censure the Universal Church because *the Sacrament is everywhere partaken of by persons fasting?* Nay, verily; for from that time it pleased the Holy Spirit to appoint, for the honour of so great a Sacrament, that the Body of the Lord should take the precedence of all other food entering the mouth of a Christian; and it is for this reason that *the custom referred to is universally observed.* For the fact that the Lord instituted the Sacrament after other food had been partaken of does not prove that brethren should come together to partake of that Sacrament after having dined or supped, or imitate those whom the apostle reprov'd and corrected for not distinguishing between the Lord's Supper and an ordinary meal. The Saviour indeed, in order to commend the depths of that Mystery more affectingly to His disciples, was pleased to impress it on their hearts and memories by making its institution His last act before going from them to His Passion. And therefore He did not prescribe the order in which it was to be observed, reserving this to be done by the apostles, through whom He intended to arrange all things pertaining to the churches. Had He appointed that the Sacrament should be always partaken of after other food, I believe that no one would have departed from that practice. But when the apostle, speaking of this Sacrament, says, 'Wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat, tarry one for another: and if

any man hunger, let him eat at home; that ye come not together unto condemnation,' he immediately adds, 'And the rest will I set in order when I come.' Whence we are given to understand that, since it was too much for him to prescribe completely in an epistle *the method observed by the Universal Church throughout the world*, it was one of the things set in order by him in person; for we find *its observance uniform amid all the variety of other customs.*"<sup>1</sup>

The exception which proves the rule was in Africa, where it was the custom, in literal compliance with the circumstances attending the Institution of the Blessed Sacrament by our Lord, to celebrate in the evening on Maunday Thursday; but even so, the fast was preserved until after Communion; for S. Augustine, an African bishop, writes that the Holy Eucharist "is offered in the morning for those who take food, because they cannot bear fasting and the use of the bath at the same time; and in the evening for those who have fasted all day."<sup>2</sup>

Sozomen, the ecclesiastical historian, who lived in the fifth century, tells us: "There are several cities and villages in Egypt where, *contrary to the usages established elsewhere*, the people meet together on Sabbath evenings, and, although they have dined previously, partake of the Mysteries."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Januarius. Letter liv. Clark's Library, vi. 8.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, vii. 9.

<sup>3</sup> *Eccles. Hist.*, b. vii. chap. 19. Bohn's ed., p. 344; referred to by Bishop Forbes on Article xxxiv.

To the same effect writes his contemporary Socrates :  
 "The Egyptians in the neighbourhood of Alexandria, and the inhabitants of Thebais, hold their religious meetings on the Sabbath, but do not participate of the Mysteries in *the manner usual among Christians in general*: for after having eaten and satisfied themselves with food of all kinds, in the evening, making their Oblation, they partake of the Mysteries."<sup>1</sup>

Anastasius Sinaita, a monk of Mount Sinai and Patriarch of Antioch (A.D. 561), in a treatise called "A Guide to the True Way," says, "One ought to be fasting when he receives the Holy Eucharist."<sup>2</sup>

Several councils, whose binding authority would obviously be but local, afford important evidence of the prevalence of the custom of Fasting Communion.

(a) The Council of Carthage, iii. c. 29 (A.D. 397):  
 "The Sacrament of the Altar shall be celebrated only by those who are fasting, except on the one anniversary when the Supper of the Lord is commemorated."<sup>3</sup>

(b) In the years 418–419 A.D., at a Synod held at Carthage, "the African Code" of Canons was adopted. No. 41 reads: "That the Sacrament of the Altar must not be celebrated by any who are not fasting, except on the day of the Lord's Supper. If Bishops or other persons die in the afternoon, let them be commended

<sup>1</sup> *Eccles. Hist.*, b. v. chap. 22. Bohn's ed., p. 289; referred to by Mr. Scudamore, *Not. Euch.*, p. 33.

<sup>2</sup> Dupin's *History of Ecclesiastical Writers*, i. 563.

<sup>3</sup> Blunt's *Dictionary of Theology v. Fasting*.

(to God) with prayers only, if they who are to perform it have broken their fast.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> On which Mr. Johnson remarks: “From this Canon, and the 29th of Trullo” (wherein reference is made to permission given at Carthage to break the fast before Communion “on the annual day when the Lord’s Supper is celebrated”—*Vade Mecum*, ii. 271), “it is evident, that by the Lord’s Supper, the ancients understood the supper going before the Eucharist itself, and that on Maunday Thursday yearly, before the Eucharist, they had such a public entertainment in imitation of our Saviour’s last Paschal Supper. I refer it to the consideration of the learned reader whether S. Paul by the *Δείπνον Κυριακόν* (1 Cor. xi. 20) does not mean this entertainment; for the obvious translation of that verse is, it is not your (duty or business) when you meet together (in the church) to eat the Lord’s Supper. He would not have them to eat this supper in the publick assembly; for (says he) have ye not houses to eat and drink in, or despise ye the Church of God? From the fourth age forward the Eucharist was sometimes called the Lord’s Supper, but from the beginning it was not so. And even after it did sometimes pass by this name, yet at other times this name was strictly used for the previous entertainment, as may be seen by this canon, which was made in the fourth century. Further, it seems probable that the Lord’s Supper and the Love Feast was the same, though it was not usually called the Lord’s Supper; but only (perhaps) that Love Feast, which was made on the day of the Institution of the Eucharist, which we now call Maunday Thursday.” *Vade Mecum*, ii. 185.

S. Chrysostom, commenting on the words of S. Paul, “When ye come together into one place, this is not to eat the Lord’s Supper,” says, “He called the early meal a supper. . . . By the *Lord’s Supper* he expresses this, the *community* of the feast. . . . Thou makest the Lord’s Supper a private meal. . . . He gave His Body equally, but thou dost not give so much as the common bread equally.” *Hom. xxvii.*, Lib. Fathers, 5, pp. 374–378.

And Mr. Blunt writes: “The use of another term, ‘the Lord’s Supper,’ is derived from 1 Cor. xi. 21, where S. Paul applies it to the Love Feast which then succeeded the celebration of the Holy Eucharist. It has led to much misapprehension of the true nature of the Sacrament; but no mistake is so unworthy of educated persons as that

(c) The Council of Braga (or Bracara), ii. c. 10 (A.D. 572): "If any presbyter shall be found in this madness after this our edict, so as to consecrate the Oblation not fasting, but after having taken any food, let him be immediately deprived of his office, and deposed by his own bishop."<sup>1</sup>

(d) The Council of Auxerre, c. 19 (A.D. 578): "No presbyter, deacon, or sub-deacon shall touch the Mass after taking meat or drink."<sup>2</sup>

(e) The Synod of Antisiodorum (held A.D. 578) presided over by Aunacharius, Bishop of Tours (canon 19), "forbids priests and deacons to say, or serve or assist at Mass, after they have eaten."<sup>3</sup>

(f) The Second Council of Macon (or Mascon), A.D. 585 (canon 6), "forbids priests to celebrate Mass after they have eat and drunk."<sup>4</sup>

(g) The Council of Toledo, vii., c. 2 (A.D. 646): "Lest what has been advised by reason of the languor of nature should be turned into a dangerous presumption, let it be understood that no one shall celebrate Mass after taking any, even the least, meat or drink."<sup>5</sup>

committed in some churches, and lately in Westminster Abbey, by placing the last supper of our Lord with His disciples over the altar as a symbol of the institution of the Eucharist. These representations are usually copied from Leonardo da Vinci's picture, which was painted for a dining-room, not for a church." *The Sacraments and Sacramental Ordinances*, p. 108.

<sup>1</sup> Blunt's *Dictionary of Theology* v. *Fasting*.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Dupin's *History of Ecclesiastical Writers*, i. 714.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, i. 716.

<sup>5</sup> Blunt's *Dictionary of Theology* v. *Fasting*.

(h) The Council of Trullo,<sup>1</sup> c. 29 (A.D. 692). In reference to the African custom: "Although for some local reasons profitable to the Church those divine Fathers made such a regulation, yet since there is no inducement for us to abandon the strict line, we determine, *in accordance with the apostolic traditions of our fathers*, that in the last week of Lent the fifth day must not be broken; for it is a dishonouring of the whole Lent."<sup>2</sup>

(i) No. 9 of the canons bearing the name of Nicephorus, Patriarch of Constantinople (A.D. 806), rules, evidently as an exception, that "the Communion may be given to a sick person who is near death, although he be not fasting."<sup>3</sup>

(j) The Council of Constance, sess. 13 (A.D. 1415): "The praiseworthy authority of the sacred canons, and *the approved custom of the Church, has held and still holds*, that a Sacrament of this kind ought not to be celebrated after supper, nor received by the faithful who are not fasting, except in case of infirmity or other necessity, on a right either granted or admitted by the Church."<sup>4</sup> At this council the English Church was represented.

<sup>1</sup> So called, Mr. Hallam tells us, from the palace, named Trullus by the Latins, at Constantinople, under the dome of which the Council was held. (*Mid. Ag.* ii. 176.) These canons were recognized as part of the English Code by the fourth of the Legatine Canons at Cealchythe (probably Chelsea), A.D. 785. Johnson's *Laws and Canons*, i. 90, 268.

<sup>2</sup> Blunt's *Dictionary of Theology* v. *Fasting*.

<sup>3</sup> Dupin's *History of Ecclesiastical Writers*, ii. 50.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted by Rev. N. Poyntz, in *The Fast before Communion*, p. 9.



(k) The Council of Mayence, c. 33 (A.D. 1549): "We seriously enjoin all parish priests and ministers of churches not to give the Eucharist to any except those who are fasting and have made confession, unless it be in cases of infirmity and necessity."<sup>1</sup>

The custom of the Anglo-Saxon Church is unmistakeable: "Then too, as now, the Sacrament was taken fasting, except in cases of extreme illness."<sup>2</sup>

Dr. Lingard testifies: "The conditions required of the (Anglo-Saxon) communicant were that he should come fasting—a practice which remounts to the first ages of Christianity,"<sup>3</sup> &c.

Archbishop Theodore of Canterbury (A.D. 673), imposed a seven days' penance on any one who should receive the Blessed Sacrament after food."<sup>4</sup>

The Venerable Bede (A.D. 734) corroborates our belief when he thus describes the last hours of (a) S. Hilda (Abbess of Whitby; died A.D. 680), who "approached her last day, and *about cockcrowing*, having received the Holy Communion to further her on her way, departed in peace;" and of (b) Cædmon, the monk, "*When it was past midnight* he asked them whether they had the Eucharist there."<sup>5</sup>

Archbishop Egbert of York (A.D. 740) ruled, "Who-soever shall eat before he go to Housel, let him fast

<sup>1</sup> Blunt's *Dictionary of Theology* v. *Fasting*.

<sup>2</sup> Rock's *Church of our Fathers*, i. 130.

<sup>3</sup> *History and Antiquities of the Anglo-Saxon Church*, i. 328.

<sup>4</sup> Baron's *Anglo-Saxon Witness*, p. 28.

<sup>5</sup> *Eccles. Hist.*, b. iv. c. 23, 24.

seven days;"<sup>1</sup> and again, "Let a man fast according to the decision of the canons before he go to Housel."<sup>2</sup>

By a canon in the reign of King Edgar (A.D. 960) it was enjoined that "No man take the Housel after he hath broke his fast, except it be on account of extreme sickness."<sup>3</sup>

S. Osmund, Bishop of Salisbury (A.D. 1078-1099), to whom we are indebted for the Sarum Use, adopted in many dioceses, lays down a similar rule with regard to the ablutions after duplicating: "When, however, any priest has to celebrate twice in one day, then at the first Mass he ought not to receive any ablution, but place it in the aumbry or in a clean vessel till the end of the next Mass, and then take both ablutions."<sup>4</sup>

S. Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury (A.D. 1093), says, "If a man puts off taking food because he has not yet that day been to the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, when he has accomplished what he had made up his mind to do first, it is not improperly said to him, Take your food now, because you have now done that for which you put off taking it."<sup>5</sup>

Hubert Fitzwalter, Archbishop of Canterbury (A.D. 1200), ruled that "A priest might not celebrate twice a day unless the necessity be urgent; and then he was to

<sup>1</sup> Baron's *Anglo-Saxon Witness*, p. 28.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Johnson's *Laws and Canons of the Church of England. Lib. Cath. Theol.*, i. 419.

<sup>4</sup> *Sarum Missal in English*, p. 319.

<sup>5</sup> *Cur Deus Homo*, c. ix.

take the ablutions of the first celebration after the second.”<sup>1</sup>

In No. 6 of the Constitutions of Stephen Langton, Archbishop of Canterbury (A.D. 1222), we read, “After the priest hath received the Lord’s Body and Blood at the altar, let him not twice drink the wine poured into the chalice, or spilt on” (*i.e.* poured over) “his fingers, though he do celebrate again the same day;” which Mr. Johnson understands to mean that a priest could not consume the ablutions at a first celebration “if he knew he was to celebrate a second time; for the drinking of the unconsecrated wine broke his fast, though drinking of the consecrated cup did not, and the Mass was to be celebrated only by such as were fasting. This I take from Bishop Lyndwood.”<sup>2</sup>

In No. 3 of the Constitutions of Simon Langham, Archbishop of Canterbury (A.D. 1367), it is ruled: “Let none presume to celebrate Mass twice a day, unless on the Day of the Nativity or Resurrection of our Lord, or when one has a corpse to bury, and that in his own church only; and then let not the celebrator drink the washings of his fingers and of the cup.”<sup>3</sup>

Richard Cosin, Dean of the Arches (who died A.D. 1597), speaks of the Primitive Church having altered “the time of the receiving the Sacrament of the Eucharist, being according to the institution usually

<sup>1</sup> Johnson’s *Laws and Canons of the Church of England*. *Lib. Cath. Theol.*, ii. 84.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, ii. 105.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, ii. 440.

received after supper, to have it received *as it is* in the morning fasting.”<sup>1</sup>

In a sermon preached at “Eaton Colledge,” by Mr. Roger Hutchinson, the Sunday next before Easter, 1552, on the gospel for the day, he says, “In that the texte sayth that whyles they were eating, Jesus toke bread, and ordeined His last Supper, some do reason hereof that the Sacrament is not to be received fastyng, *as the custome nowe is*, but after other meates and drynkes . . . *the universall Church commonly accordyng to Paules mynd to the Corinthians useth nowe to celebrate the Lordes Supper fastyng.*” Perhaps this testimony to the then custom is the more striking as borne by a man who was not himself prepared rigidly to enforce its observance, as he adds: “Notwithstandyng as he doeth well whiche commeth fastynge to the Lordes table, so he doeth not ill *whyche by occasion commeth* after that he hath eaten and dronke;” but the paragraph is summed up in the margin in these words, “It is best to come to Christes banquet fasting.”<sup>2</sup>

Dr. Jeremy Taylor, Bishop of Down and Connor (who died A.D. 1667), says, “*It is the custom of the Church of great antiquity and proportionable regard* that every Christian that is in health should receive the Blessed Sacrament fasting. . . . Of some also in Africa that

<sup>1</sup> *An Answer to an Abstract of certeine Acts of Parliament*, p. 60. 1584.

<sup>2</sup> “A faithful Declaration of Christes Holy Supper” (1552), the fyrst Sermon. Referred to by Rev. H. T. Kingdon, Bishop-Coadjutor-Nominate of Fredericton, in *Fasting Communion*, p. 97.

communicated at evening S. Austin speaks, and of others who communicated both morning and evening ; at evening because S. Paul called it 'the Lord's Supper,' and in the morning from *the universal custom of the Church, which in most cases from the very days of the apostles prevailed*, that the Holy Eucharist should be given to none but to them that were fasting, which thing was also decreed in the third Council of Carthage, and *hath been observed ever since*. And in this the Church hath not without good reason taken up the custom."<sup>1</sup>

And again, "Fasting before the Holy Sacrament is a custom of the Christian Church, and derived to us from great antiquity ; and the use of it is, that we might express honour to the Mystery by suffering nothing to enter into our mouths before the Symbols."<sup>2</sup>

And yet once more, "*It is a Catholic custom that they who receive the Holy Communion should receive it fasting. This is not a duty commanded by God ; but unless it be necessary to eat, he that despises this custom gives nothing but the testimony of an evil mind.*"<sup>3</sup>

Dr. Anthony Sparrow, Bishop successively of Exeter and Norwich (who died A.D. 1688), tells us the usual hour for the celebration of the Holy Communion was

<sup>1</sup> *Worthy Communicant*, vii. 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Life of Christ*, ii. xii. 13.

<sup>3</sup> *Ductor dubitantium*, iii. iv. 15.

9 a.m.;<sup>1</sup> and for this selection he assigns various reasons, and amongst others, "Till the service was ended men were persuaded to be fasting, and therefore it was thought fit to end all the service before noon, that people might be free to eat."<sup>2</sup> . . . "This Sacrament should be received fasting. And so was the practice of the universal Church, says S. Augustine, *which is authority enough* (in things of this nature; namely, circumstances of time, &c.) *to satisfy any that do not love contention.* (1 Cor. xi. 16.) Yet it will not be amiss in a word to show the reasonableness of *this Catholic usage.*" The bishop then urges the suitableness for ourselves in this custom, the act of reverence therein shown to our Lord, and quotes S. Augustine's letter to Januarius.<sup>3</sup>

The judgment of the Rev. Joseph Bingham (A.D. 1722), the learned author of the *Antiquities of the*

<sup>1</sup> Heylyn (as referred to in *Not. Euch.*, p. 29) says that the ancient practice of the Church of England was that the celebration of the Holy Eucharist should be at 9 a.m. or 10 a.m., which custom continued in his time (A.D. 1637) at Winchester, at Southwell, and perhaps elsewhere. Mr. Scudamore adds, that by canon law in the sixth century the third hour (9 a.m.) was fixed as the proper time, and that hence arose its name of The Sacred Hour, or, as in Italy, The Golden Hour; that in the ninth century it was a subject of enquiry at episcopal visitations whether the priest celebrated Mass at the appointed time, that is, about the third hour of the day; and S. Gregory the Great (A.D. 590), and S. Gregory of Tours (A.D. 575), also make similar reference to the same hour.

<sup>2</sup> *A Rationale upon the Book of Common Prayer of the Church of England.* Oxford edition, p. 196.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 219.

*Church*, is, "*The general custom of the Church was to celebrate the Eucharist fasting.*"<sup>1</sup>

Bishop Wilberforce, in his *Charge* of November, 1860, dealt with the question of Evening Communion, and said, "I cannot allow that any difficulties warrant this innovation,"<sup>2</sup> his grounds for this conclusion being: "(1) that it is *contrary to the usage of the whole Church*, certainly from very early, and most probably from Apostolic times; (2) that it involves an unlawful use of our Liturgy;<sup>3</sup> and (3) that it directly tends to the desecration of the highest rite of our holy religion." After referring to Pliny's letter, the bishop says, "From this time downward we have an unbroken chain of proof as to the *practice of the Church*. The words of Tertullian in the second century are plainly to the point; so are those of S. Cyprian in the third; and in the fourth we have S. Augustine's reference to the practice of celebrating on one evening in the week; namely, on the anniversary of the institution of the Lord's Supper, in words which prove *the universality of the rule*, to which this was a special exception. Thus we trace up an unbroken custom of condemning late communions to within the period when the voice of the beloved apostle must have been instructing the Christian Church in the Lesser Asia."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Antiq.*, xv. vii. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Bishop Wilberforce's *Charge* (1860), p. 13.

<sup>3</sup> As the rubrical direction that the collect shall be said at the *Evening Service next before*.

<sup>4</sup> Bishop Wilberforce's *Charge* (1860), p. 14.

Amongst others whose opinions of the subject will carry the greatest weight may be mentioned Dr. Christopher Wordsworth, Bishop of Lincoln, who writes: "In sub-apostolic times it became usual to receive the Holy Communion very early in the morning." "It cannot be doubted that at the close of the fourth century it was *the practice of the Church* to receive the Communion before any other food."<sup>1</sup>

Rev. J. H. Blunt says: "Fasting before Communion has been practised from the time of the apostles in all countries."<sup>2</sup>

Canon Bright, Regius Professor of Ecclesiastical History in the University of Oxford, says: "Nothing less than the authority of apostles will adequately account for *the universality of morning celebrations in all the widely-separated branches of the Church*. Nothing less than the fearful scandals of the Corinthian practice—which combined the ordinary physical excitement of a late hour with the evils of indulgence at a previous meal—would most naturally account for the *universal abandonment* of a traditional usage, which at least might plead literal correspondence with the formal action of our Lord when instituting the Sacrament. Is it too much to say that we are asked by the partisans of the modern innovation to ignore the experience and to reverse the decision of the apostles themselves?"<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Twelve Addresses* (1878), pp. 74, 76.

<sup>2</sup> *Dictionary of Doctrinal and Historical Theology. Fasting.*

<sup>3</sup> *Evening Communion*, p. 7.



The Rev. A. R. Ashwell, Canon of Chichester, wrote: "Sunday evening Communion never existed anywhere."<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Scudamore, the author of *Notitia Eucharistica*, testifies: "It was *the universal rule and practice*, derived from primitive times, to celebrate in the morning only (except at certain seasons specified by authority), and I am not aware that before the present age any priest of our Church ever desired to break through a rule so venerable from its antiquity, and wholesome in its effect."<sup>2</sup>

Rev. Prebendary Walcott: "The canonical hour for the Holy Communion is mentioned by S. Gregory of Tours as Tierce; at Durham it was nine; and by the Council of Norwich, 1257, was not to precede Prime. The design was that communicants should be fasting."<sup>3</sup>

William of Malmesbury, when complaining of the customs of the English at the time of the Norman conquest, writes: "The nobility, given up to luxury and wantonness, went not to church *in the morning after the manner of Christians*, but merely, in a careless manner, heard matins and masses from a hurrying priest in their chambers." (Bohn's ed., p. 279.)

Even in what Dr. Pusey calls "the dreary interval of the eighteenth century," this reverent custom had not entirely died out.

<sup>1</sup> *Evening Communions*, p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> *Notitia Eucharistica*, p. 30.

<sup>3</sup> *Sacred Archaeology*—"Canonical Hours."

Perhaps some trace of its existence may be found in a letter written by Mrs. Delany, dated 1729, in which she refers to her aunt, Lady Stanley, of whom it is recorded, "On Sunday morning *she got up very early to receive the Sacrament.*"<sup>1</sup>

Bishop Sumner has placed it on record that fasting Communion was the reverent practice of George IV. "The king was usually in the habit of receiving It alone, and fasting, at ten o'clock."<sup>2</sup>

This royal homage paid by the then sovereign to the King of kings was doubtless a matter of tradition. Dean Stanley (who refers to Maskell), when speaking of the coronation of the English sovereigns, which has without any exception taken place in Westminster Abbey from the time of the Conqueror, says: "The celebration of the Communion<sup>3</sup> always formed part of it." "The breaking of the fast immediately after the Communion was in the retiring place by S. Edward's shrine in the Abbey."<sup>4</sup>

And Mr. Maskell himself tells us: "I may observe that the fatigue of the sovereign, as not unfrequently noticed in the old histories and records, is to be referred

<sup>1</sup> *Mrs. Delany's Autobiography*, i. 206.

<sup>2</sup> *Life of Bishop Sumner*, p. 78.

<sup>3</sup> But the Dean subsequently (p. 87) excepts the coronations of James II. and Queen Anne, who very properly did not in their unbelief profane the Blessed Sacrament by communicating. There is no mention of a Celebration in Sandford's *History of the Coronation of James II.*, 1687.

<sup>4</sup> *Historical Memorials of Westminster Abbey*, p. 44.

to the obligation under which he was to receive the Holy Communion fasting.<sup>1</sup> And 'the Devyse'<sup>2</sup> has an especial reference to this, succeeding the conclusion of the Mass. 'And also it is to wite, that a certein place nere the seid shryne must be prepared with trauers and curteyns, by the usshers of the King's chambre. Wherunto immediately the King shall goo, and there breke his faste yf hym lyst.'"<sup>3</sup>

"There is scarcely an instance upon record, from the time that the coronation of our sovereigns became an office especially to be fulfilled by the Church, that the celebration of the Holy Communion did not also form a part of it, either before or after, or mixed up with the rites and ceremonies of the solemnity itself. Nor has it been otherwise with other Christian nations."<sup>4</sup>

"The outward form of consecration in England remained essentially unaltered from the time of Ethelred to that of George IV."<sup>5</sup>

Another act of royal homage on communicating may

<sup>1</sup> At the close of the coronation service of Richard II., July 16th, 1377, "the boy king, exhausted by the long effort, was carried out fainting."—*Hist. Mem. West. Abbey*, p. 69.

<sup>2</sup> "The Devyse" is a MS. in the British Museum (Cotton. *Tib. E.*, viii.), consisting of directions for the ceremonial to be observed at the coronation of Henry VIII.; the oath prefixed, with interlineations in the king's own hand.

<sup>3</sup> Maskell's *Monumenta Ritualia Ecclesiæ Anglicanæ*, iii. lv.

<sup>4</sup> Maskell, iii. 39.

<sup>5</sup> Introduction by Editor of *Liber Regalis* (a MS., 1350–1380, containing the order of coronation of Richard II.), Roxburghe Club, p. vi.

here be mentioned ; viz., the removal of the sovereign's crown. When George III. at his coronation was about to receive the Blessed Sacrament, he enquired of the Archbishop of Canterbury if the crown ought not to be laid aside during Communion. As the Most Rev. Prelate, after consultation as to a precedent with the Right Rev. and Very Rev. the Dean, failed to satisfy His Majesty, the king, with that instinctive and innate feeling of reverence which was so characteristically his, bared his head in recognition of the August Presence in which he knelt. But as a fact, had the Archbishop but known it (as Mr. Maskell points out), Henry II. and Queen Eleanor, and Charles II., and probably other sovereigns previously, as well as Queen Victoria since, uncrowned themselves to receive the Holy Communion.<sup>1</sup>

Bishop Wordsworth, when speaking of the fact that there is nothing unprofitable in the word of God, quotes the saying of Origen, "*Nihil otiosum in sacrâ Scripturâ.*" Now there are three acts of special reverence to our Lord's Body which have been embedded in the pages of the Bible by God the Holy Ghost, and which seem specially to bear on the subject before us. 1. We are told that when the Saviour of the world was born the Virgin brought forth her "*firstborn Son.*" (S. Luke ii. 7.) 2. When our Lord rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday the entry was made upon an ass' colt, "whereon (yet) never man sat." (S. Mark xi. 2 ; S. Luke xix. 30.) 3.

<sup>1</sup> Maskell, iii. 51-53.

After our Lord's death S. Joseph of Arimathæa laid the sacred Body "in his own *new* tomb" (S. Matthew xxvii. 60), "wherein never man before was laid" (S. Luke xxiii. 53), "wherein was never man yet laid." (S. John xix. 41.) And the Catholic Church, "discerning the Lord's Body" (1 Cor. xi. 29) in the Sacrament of the altar, has observed the custom of preparing for Him, Who deigns to come under our roof, a lodging in which nothing has that day been previously laid.

The rubric at the end of the office for holy matrimony reads: "It is convenient that the newly-married persons should receive the Holy Communion at the time of their marriage, or at the first opportunity after their marriage." The rubric of A.D. 1549 was: "The new married persons (the same day of their marriage) must receive the Holy Communion." The Wedding Mass formed a part of the marriage office in the Sarum book.<sup>1</sup> And the antiquity of this practice is evidenced in the words of Tertullian, who wrote (A.D. 200): "How can we find words to describe the happiness of that marriage, which the Church joineth together, and the Oblation confirmeth,"<sup>2</sup> &c. It is well to remember, in connection with this, two facts—(a) that the canonical hours for marriage are between eight and twelve a.m. (Canons lxii. cii.), on which Mr. Blunt remarks: "The origin of the limitation is obscure; it was probably either (1) the

<sup>1</sup> *Prayer Book Interleaved*, p. 207.

<sup>2</sup> *Ad. Ux.*, ii. 8.

desire to ensure publicity, or (2) the invariable association with matrimony of the Holy Eucharist, which might only be received fasting;”<sup>1</sup> (b) that the feast which follows the wedding is traditionally known as “the breakfast.”

We have then, as to the prevalent custom of Fasting Communion in the Catholic Church, the following direct or corroborative evidence :

In the first century, Pliny, in Bithynia.

In the second century, Tertullian, in North Africa.

In the third century, S. Cyprian, in North Africa.

In the fourth century, S. Basil, Bishop of Cappadocia ; S. Ambrose, Bishop of Milan ; S. Gregory Nazianzen, Bishop of Constantinople ; Timothy, Bishop of Alexandria, and the Council of Carthage.

In the fifth century, S. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, in Africa ; S. Chrysostom, Bishop of Constantinople ; Socrates and Sozomen, both of Constantinople ; the African Code.

In the sixth century, the Councils of Macon and Auxerre, in France ; the Council of Braga, in Portugal ; the Synod of Antisiodorum ; and Anastasius, Patriarch of Antioch.

In the seventh century, the Council of Toledo, in Spain ; the Council of Trullo, at Constantinople ; Theodore, Archbishop of Canterbury ; and the Venerable Bede.

In the eighth century, Egbert, Archbishop of York.

In the ninth century, Nicephorus, Patriarch of Constantinople.

In the tenth century, an Anglo-Saxon Canon in the reign of King Edgar.

<sup>1</sup> *Dictionary*—“Marriage.”

In the eleventh century, S. Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury, and S. Osmund, Bishop of Sarum.

In the twelfth century, Herbert Fitzwalter, Archbishop of Canterbury.

In the thirteenth century, Langton, Archbishop of Canterbury.

In the fourteenth century, Langham, Archbishop of Canterbury.

In the fifteenth century, the Council of Constance.

In the sixteenth century, the Council of Mayence; Cosin, Dean of the Arches; Mr. Roger Hutchinson.

In the seventeenth century, Jeremy Taylor, Bishop of Down and Connor; Anthony Sparrow, Bishop of Exeter and Norwich.

The remarkable evidence of the observance of the apparently unbroken custom of Fasting Communion at coronation through so many centuries alone serves to stamp the practice as national. I may add another quotation from Mr. Blunt's *Dictionary of Doctrinal and Historical Theology*: "Persons about to die have always been allowed to receive the Blessed Sacrament, even though they may not be fasting; and there are some (even among Roman theologians) who hold that this dispensation must be extended to the Paschal Communion for those who could not otherwise communicate without serious injury to health. It is argued that since communicating is of divine obligation, and the preparatory fasting is only of ecclesiastical precept, therefore fasting must be given up rather than so necessary a

duty as communion be omitted. So, again, the same argument may be carried on beyond the one annual Communion, and weakly persons may be communicated not fasting, as often as shall seem desirable, provided it is not done too frequently. The present authoritative practice of the Roman Church is, however, opposed to these relaxations, and admits to unfasting Communion only when the Eucharist is received as the Viaticum. The rules of the Eastern Church as to fasting before Communion are still more rigid than those of the Western. The observance of fasting before Communion has continued on in some places in England amidst all the lax habits of the last century, and persons now living (A.D. 1869) remember their mothers omitting breakfast on Sacrament Sundays.”<sup>1</sup>

We have seen what was the custom in France, in Italy, in Portugal, in Germany, and in Spain, as well as at Constantinople, in Asia Minor, in North Africa, and in the Anglo-Saxon Church. Now “so far was it from the purpose of the Church of England to forsake and reject the Churches of Italy, France, Spain, Germany, or any such like churches, in all things which they held and practised, that, as the *Apology of the Church of England* confesseth,<sup>2</sup> it doth with reverence retain those ceremonies, which doth neither endamage the Church of

<sup>1</sup> v. *Fasting*.

<sup>2</sup> “We keep still and esteem those ceremonies which we thought might be suffered without hurt to the Church of God.”—BISHOP JEWELL’S *Apology*, xvii. 1.



God, nor offend the minds of sober men ; and only departed from them in those particular points wherein they were fallen both from themselves in their ancient integrity, and from the Apostolical Churches which were their first founders.”<sup>1</sup> And the Homily on the Sacrament says, “ Before all other things this we must be sure of especially, that this Supper be in such wise done and ministered, as our Lord and Saviour did, and commanded to be done ; as His holy Apostles used It, and the good Fathers of the Primitive Church frequented It.”<sup>2</sup>

While the custom of Fasting Communion may thus be seen to have evidently so generally prevailed, it is equally clear that there was no rigid and invariable enforcement of it, when through sickness or other reasonable hindrance, fasting was impossible : when to attempt to abstain from all food would have been virtual excommunication. If the choice had to be made between not communicating at all, and occasional and exceptional receiving after food, the “ ecclesiastical precept,” as Mr. Blunt puts it, would give way to the “ Divine Obligation.” An exception to the Catholic custom was thus recognized and permitted : in the Anglo-Saxon Church, “ on account of extreme sickness ;”<sup>3</sup> by the Council of Constance, “ in case of infirmity or other necessity, on a right either granted or admitted by the Church ;”<sup>4</sup> and by the Council of

<sup>1</sup> Canon xxx.

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Corrie's Edition, p. 444.

<sup>3</sup> Above, p. 16.

<sup>4</sup> Above, p. 16.

Mayence, "in cases of infirmity and necessity."<sup>1</sup> And provision was made by Archbishop Nicephorus for communicating "a sick person who is near death, although he be not fasting."<sup>2</sup> But of evidence of systematic non-fasting or evening communion, there is no trace. And nothing short of absolute necessity, as Bishop Jeremy Taylor says,<sup>3</sup> could justify the violation of Church custom by those whose rule is, as expressed in innumerable authoritative documents, an appeal to Primitive and Catholic Antiquity. Where this necessity may exist, reverence would suggest that when complete abstinence is impossible, the nearest possible approach to it should be observed.

May we not with all confidence believe that included in the obligation which rests upon us to render to all their dues—custom to whom custom—is the reverent practice of fasting reception of the Blessed Sacrament? May we not—with such abundant evidence as to Catholic usage, to which the Church of England at the Reformation so uniformly appealed as her standard in matters of doctrine, discipline, and ritual—entrench ourselves, as we deprecate the recent and modern, and therefore un-catholic, innovation of late and non-fasting Communion, in the position once maintained by S. Paul—"If any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God"? (1 Cor. xi. 16.)

<sup>1</sup> Above, p. 17.

<sup>2</sup> Above, p. 14.

<sup>3</sup> Above, p. 20.

The letter of S. Augustine to Januarius, from which quotation has been already made, is, throughout, full of interest in its bearing on our subject, and on matters closely connected with it; it is of great authority; and perhaps not easily accessible to many. In its completeness, moreover, it affords the truest insight into the mind of this eminent saint and doctor of the Church, and as to Catholic practice and feeling in the fourth and fifth centuries. It is therefore added in its entirety:

*"To his beloved son Januarius, Augustine sends greeting in the Lord. (Letter liv.<sup>1</sup> A.D. 400.)*

"Chap. i. 1. In regard to the questions which you have asked me, I would have liked to have known what your own answers would have been; for thus I might have made my reply in fewer words, and might most easily confirm or correct your opinions, by approving or amending the answers which you had given. This I would have greatly preferred. But desiring to answer you at once, I think it better to write a long letter than incur loss of time. I desire you therefore, in the first place, to hold fast this as the fundamental principle in the present discussion, that our Lord Jesus Christ has appointed to us a 'light yoke' and an 'easy burden,' as He declares in the gospel," in accordance with which He has bound His people under the new dispensation together in fellowship by sacraments, which are in number very few, in

<sup>1</sup> S. Augustine's *Letters*. Edited by Clark. Vol. i. pp. 196-204.

<sup>2</sup> S. Matt. xi. 30.

observance most easy, and in significance most excellent, as Baptism solemnized in the Name of the Trinity, the Communion of His Body and Blood, and such other things as are prescribed in the canonical Scriptures, with the exception of those enactments which were a yoke of bondage to God's ancient people, suited to their state of heart and to the times of the prophets, and which are found in the five books of Moses. As to those other things which we hold on the authority, not of Scripture, but of tradition, and which are observed throughout the whole world, it may be understood that they are held as approved and instituted either by the apostles themselves, or by plenary Councils, whose authority in the Church is most useful, *e.g.*, the annual commemoration, by special solemnities, of the Lord's Passion, Resurrection, and Ascension, and of the descent of the Holy Spirit from heaven, and whatever else is in like manner observed by the whole Church wherever it has been established.

“Chap. ii. 2. There are other things, however, which are different in different places and countries; *e.g.*, some fast on Saturday, others do not; some partake daily of the Body and Blood of Christ; others receive It on stated days: in some places no day passes without the Sacrifice being offered; in others it is only on Saturday and the Lord's Day, or it may be only on the Lord's Day. In regard to these and all other variable observances which may be met anywhere, one is at liberty to comply with them or not as he chooses; and there is no better rule for the wise and serious Christian in this matter, than to conform to the practice which

he finds prevailing in the Church to which it may be his lot to come. For such a custom, if it is clearly not contrary to the faith nor to sound morality, is to be held as a thing indifferent, and ought to be observed for the sake of fellowship with those among whom we live.

“3. I think you may have heard me relate before, what I will nevertheless now mention. When my mother followed me to Milan, she found the Church there not fasting on Saturday. She began to be troubled, and to hesitate as to what she should do; upon which I, though not taking a personal interest then in such things, applied on her behalf to Ambrose, of most blessed memory, for his advice. He answered that he could not teach me anything but what he himself practised, because if he knew any better rule he would observe it himself. When I supposed that he intended, on the ground of his authority alone, and without supporting it by any argument, to recommend us to give up fasting on Saturday, he followed me, and said: ‘When I visit Rome, I fast on Saturday; when I am here, I do not fast. On the same principle, do you observe the custom prevailing in whatever Church you come to, if you desire neither to give offence by your conduct, nor to find cause of offence in another’s.’ When I reported this to my mother, she accepted it gladly; and for myself, after frequently reconsidering his decision, I have always esteemed it as if I had received it by an oracle from heaven. For often have I perceived, with extreme sorrow, many disquietudes caused to weak brethren by the contentious pertinacity or superstitious vacillation of some who, in matters of

this kind, which do not admit of final decision by the authority of Holy Scripture, or by the tradition of the universal Church, or by their manifest good influence or manners, raise questions, it may be, from some crotchet of their own, or from attachment to the custom followed in one's own country, or from preference for that which one has seen abroad, supposing that wisdom is increased in proportion to the distance to which men travel from home, and agitate these questions with such keenness, that they think all is wrong except what they do themselves.

“Chap. iii. 4. Someone may say, ‘The Eucharist ought not to be taken every day.’ You ask, ‘On what grounds?’ He answers, ‘Because, in order that a man may approach worthily to so great a Sacrament, he ought to choose those days upon which he lives in more special purity and self-restraint; for ‘whosoever eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh judgment to himself.’” Another answers, ‘Certainly; if the wound inflicted by sin and the violence of the soul’s distemper be such that the use of these remedies must be put off for a time, every man in this case should be, by the authority of the bishop, forbidden to approach the altar, and appointed to do penance, and should be afterwards restored to privileges by the same authority; for this would be partaking unworthily, if one should partake of it at a time when he ought to be doing penance; and it is not a matter to be left to one’s own judgment to withdraw himself from the communion of the Church, or restore himself, as he pleases. If, how-

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. xi. 29.

ever, his sins are not so great as to bring him justly under sentence of excommunication, he ought not to withdraw himself from the daily use of the Lord's Body for the healing of his soul.' Perhaps a third party interposes with a more just decision of the question, reminding them that the principal thing is to remain united in the peace of Christ, and that each should be free to do what, according to his belief, he conscientiously regards as his duty. For neither of them lightly esteems the Body and Blood of the Lord; on the contrary, both are contending who shall most highly honour the Sacrament fraught with blessing. There was no controversy between those two mentioned in the gospel, Zacchæus and the Centurion; nor did either of them think himself better than the other, though, whereas the former received the Lord joyfully into his house,<sup>1</sup> the latter said, 'I am not worthy that Thou shouldest come under my roof,'<sup>2</sup>—both honouring the Saviour, though in ways diverse and, as it were, mutually opposed; both miserable through sin, and both obtaining the mercy they required. We may further borrow an illustration here, from the fact that the manna given to the ancient people of God tasted in each man's mouth as he desired that it might.<sup>3</sup> It is

<sup>1</sup> S. Luke xix. 6.

<sup>2</sup> S. Matt. viii. 8.

<sup>3</sup> In his *Retractions*, b. ii. cxx., S. Augustine remarks on this statement, "I do not recollect any passage by which it could be substantiated, except from the book of Wisdom (xvi. 21), which the Jews do not admit to be of canonical authority." He says, in the same place, that this peculiarity of the manna must have been enjoyed only by the pious in Israel, not by the murmurers who said, "Our soul loatheth this light bread." (Numb. xxi. 5.)

the same with this world-subduing Sacrament in the heart of each Christian. For he that dares not take It every day, and he who dares not omit It any day, are both alike moved by a desire to do It honour. That sacred Food will not submit to be despised, as the manna could not be loathed with impunity. Hence the apostle says that It was unworthily partaken of by those who did not distinguish between This and all other meats, by yielding to It the special veneration which was due; for to the words quoted already, 'eateth and drinketh judgment to himself,' he has added these, 'not discerning the Lord's Body;' and this is apparent from the whole of that passage in the first Epistle to the Corinthians, if it be carefully studied.

"Chap. iv. 5. Suppose some foreigner visit a place in which during Lent it is customary to abstain from the use of the bath, and to continue fasting on Thursday. 'I will not fast to-day,' he says. The reason being asked, he says, 'Such is not the custom in my own country.' Is not he, by such conduct, attempting to assert the superiority of his custom over theirs? For he cannot quote a decisive passage on the subject from the Book of God; nor can he prove his opinion to be right by the unanimous voice of the universal Church, wherever spread abroad; nor can he demonstrate that they act contrary to the faith, and he according to it, or that they are doing what is prejudicial to sound morality, and he is defending its interests. Those men injure their own tranquillity and peace by quarrelling on an unnecessary question. I would rather recommend that,



in matters of this kind, each man should, when sojourning in a country in which he finds a custom different from his own, consent to do as others do. If, on the other hand, a Christian, when travelling abroad in some region where the people of God are more numerous, and more easily assembled together, and more zealous in religion, has seen, *e.g.* the Sacrifice twice offered, both morning and evening, on the Thursday of the last week in Lent, and therefore, on his coming back to his own country, where It is offered only at the close of the day, protests against this as wrong and unlawful, because he has himself seen another custom in another land, this would show a childish weakness of judgment against which we should guard ourselves, and which we must bear with in others, but correct in all who are under our influence.

“Chap. v. 6. Observe now to which of these three classes the first question in your letter is to be referred. You ask, ‘What ought to be done on the Thursday of the last week of Lent? Ought we to offer the Sacrifice in the morning, and again after supper, on account of the words in the gospel, “Likewise also . . . after supper”? Or ought we to fast and offer the Sacrifice only after supper? Or ought we to fast until the offering has been made, and then take supper as we are accustomed to do?’ I answer, therefore, that if the authority of Scripture has decided which of these methods is right, there is no room for doubting that we should do according to that which is written; and our discussion must be occupied with a question, not of duty, but of interpretation as to the meaning of the Divine Institution. In like manner,

if the Universal Church follows any one of these methods, there is no room for doubt as to our duty; for it would be the height of arrogant madness, to discuss whether or not we should comply with it. But the question which you propose is not decided either by Scripture or by universal practice. It must, therefore, be referred to the third class — as pertaining; namely, to things which are different in different places and countries. Let every man, therefore, conform himself to the usage prevailing in the Church to which he may come. For none of these methods is contrary to the Christian faith or the interests of morality, as favoured by the adoption of one custom more than the other. If this were the case, that either the faith or sound morality were at stake, it would be necessary either to change what was done amiss, or to appoint the doing of what had been neglected. But mere change of custom, even though it may be of advantage in some respects, unsettles men by reason of the novelty; therefore, if it brings no advantage, it does much harm by unprofitably disturbing the Church.

“7. Let me add, that it would be a mistake to suppose that the custom prevalent in many places of offering the Sacrifice on that day after partaking of food, is to be traced to the words, ‘Likewise after supper,’ &c. For the Lord might give the name of supper to what they had received in already partaking of His Body, so that it was after this that they partook of the cup; as the apostle says in another place. ‘When ye come together into one place, this is not to *eat* the Lord’s Supper,’ giving to the receiving of the Eucharist to that

extent (*i.e.* the eating of the Bread) the name of the Lord's Supper.

"Chap. vi. As to the question whether upon that day it is right to partake of food before either offering or partaking of the Eucharist, these words in the gospel might go far to decide our minds, 'As they were eating, Jesus took bread and blessed it;' taken in connection with the words in the preceding context, 'When the even was come He sat down with the twelve: and as they did eat, He said, Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray Me.' For it was after that that He instituted the Sacrament; and it is clear that when the disciples first received the Body and Blood of the Lord they had not been fasting. Must we therefore censure the Universal Church because the Sacrament is everywhere partaken of by persons fasting? Nay, verily; for from that time it pleased the Holy Spirit to appoint, for the honour of so great a Sacrament, that the Body of the Lord should take the precedence of all other food entering the mouth of a Christian; and it is for this reason that the custom referred to is universally observed. For the fact that the Lord instituted the Sacrament after other food had been partaken of does not prove that brethren should come together to partake of that Sacrament after having dined or supped, or imitate those whom the apostle reproved and corrected for not distinguishing between the Lord's Supper and an ordinary meal. The Saviour indeed, in order to commend the depths of that Mystery more affectingly to His disciples, was pleased to impress It on their hearts and memories by making its institution His last

act before going from them to His Passion. And therefore He did not prescribe the order in which it was to be observed, reserving this to be done by the apostles, through whom He intended to arrange all things pertaining to the churches. Had He appointed that the Sacrament should be always partaken of after other food, I believe that no one would have departed from that practice. But when the apostle, speaking of this Sacrament, says, 'Wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat, tarry one for another: and if any man hunger, let him eat at home; that ye come not together unto condemnation,' he immediately adds, 'And the rest will I set in order when I come.' Whence we are given to understand that, since it was too much for him to prescribe completely in an epistle the method observed by the Universal Church throughout the world, it was one of the things set in order by him in person; for we find its observance uniform amid all the variety of other customs.

"Chap. vii. 9. There are, indeed, some to whom it has seemed right (and their view is not unreasonable) that it is lawful for the Body and Blood of the Lord to be offered and received after other food has been partaken of, on one fixed day of the year, the day on which the Lord instituted the Supper, in order to give special solemnity to the service on that anniversary. I think that, in this case, it would be more seemly to have It celebrated at such an hour as would leave it in the power of any who have fasted to attend the service before the repast which is customary at the ninth hour. Wherefore we neither compel, nor do we dare to forbid,

any one to break his fast before the Lord's Supper on that day. I believe, however, that the real ground upon which this custom rests is, that many, nay, almost all, are accustomed in most places to use the bath on that day. And because some continue to fast, It is offered in the morning, for those who take food, because they cannot bear fasting and the use of the bath at the same time; and in the evening, for those who have fasted all day.

"10. If you ask me whence originated the custom of using the bath on that day, nothing occurs to me, when I think of it, as more likely than it was to avoid the offence to decency which must have been given at the baptismal font, if the bodies of those to whom that rite was to be administered were not washed on some preceding day from the uncleanness consequent on their strict abstinence from ablutions during Lent; and that this particular day was chosen for the purpose because of its being the anniversary of the institution of the Supper. And this being granted to those who were about to receive Baptism, many others desired to join them in the luxury of a bath, and in relaxation of their fast.

"Having discussed these questions to the best of my ability, I exhort you to observe, in so far as you may be able, what I have laid down, as becomes a wise and peace-loving son of the Church. The remainder of your question I purpose, if the Lord will, to answer at another time."









